



Testimony of
Jo-Anne Basile, Executive Director
CT Votes for Animals
Before
The Joint Committee on the Environment
March, 3, 2021
On

Supporting HB 6504 With Reservations

HB 6504, An Act Concerning Animal Welfare - Support with Reservations

CVA thanks the Committee for bringing forward HB 6504 and the many positive revisions it makes to CT's statutes. The Department of Agriculture is to be commended with its successful administration of the Animal Population Control Program (APCP). CVA specifically thanks the Department's proposal to increase from 10 to 20% the amount of funds available to sterilize and vaccinate feral cats. This has been a remarkably successful program where all the funds available are used for their stated purpose.

CVA also supports the Department's proposal to increase the veterinarian voucher allowances for cats and dogs. The participation of veterinarians is an obvious critical element to the success of CT's program. The rates for the vouchers have not kept pace with the cost of inflation and as a result, veterinarians are finding it difficult to continue participation. The proposed increase will go a long way in helping to ameliorate that situation.

CVA would encourage the Committee to review and consider lowering or giving the Department the flexibility to lower the mandated \$300,000 limit by which the Department must cease issuing low-income vouchers in a fiscal year. The Committee may be unaware but last year, the \$300,000 limit was reached in December 2020. In effect the Department had to cease offering low-income vouchers six months into the program. They are unable to issue vouchers until the new fiscal year begins July 2021. CVA believes this is a problem in the program and demands that a remedy be investigated.

Lastly and importantly CVA would like to bring to the Committee's attention our concern about the proposed definition change of "animal" as presented in HB 6504. Several policy & legal experts have reviewed the proposed changes and we are perplexed as to why the term has been modified in this fashion. As we understand it, the term "animal" has been redefined and removes animals who were not bred, born and raised in captivity. This redefinition has a real possibility to endanger community cats and wildlife, at a minimum, by removing animal control protections for these animals. As we understand it, the change will:

- Leave a void in overseeing community cats by removing protections offered by Animal Control Officers. The new definition of "animal" appears to exempt creatures such as feral cats who were *"not bred, born and raised in captivity"*;
- Stop Animal Control Officers from intervening in wildlife cruelty situations;
- Potentially create confused interpretations in other sections of the law.

If we are misreading the proposed change, we ask for a clear explanation so we better understand the Department's intentions and its plan to protect these animals. If our interpretation is correct, we ask that the

definition be modified so feral cats and wildlife are afforded the protection they deserve under CT statutes.

We are available to work with the Committee and or Department to clarify this section of the proposal.

To Anne Basile

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